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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5869
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0228
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4503
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3798
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7324
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4876
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1079
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1094
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0923
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3090
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0731

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000283

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; STATE FOR INR/B; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/2017

TAGS: PGOV PINR BM

SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHY: SHWE MANN, BURMA'S DICTATOR-IN-WAITING

REF: A. RANGOON 263
1B. RANGOON 166
1C. RANGOON 48
1D. NEW DELHI 364

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Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Most observers view General "Thura" Shwe Mann, the Burmese regime's number three, as Senior General Than Shwe's preferred successor. Infrequently seen in public, Shwe Mann quietly runs the Ministry of Defense and appears to have the respect of officers of all ranks. More than a decade younger than the two top leaders, Shwe Mann played a lead role in the ouster of former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, but Shwe Mann appears to also have crony business connections and complicity in human right violations. Sources claim Shwe Mann is a reformer, who once consolidates power, would open Burma to more international engagement. This could be nothing more than wishful thinking. END SUMMARY.

EDUCATION AND MILITARY EXPERIENCE

12. (C) Shwe Mann was born on July 11, 1947 in Kanyuntkwin, Bago Division. He graduated from the Defense Services Academy at Pyin Oo Lwin in 1969 in Intake Batch 11. He rose through the ranks and distinguished himself during the campaign to capture the Karen National Union's headquarters at Maner Plaw in 1989, for which he received the title "Thura" (brave hero). Like most Burmese field commanders, Shwe Mann utilized forced civilian porters, including women and children, on a massive scale during operations against Karen insurgents.

13. (C) He served in the 66th Light Infantry Division in Bago from 1991-1996, when he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and named Commander of 11 Light Infantry Division in Rangoon. In November 1997, he was named a member of the

State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and went to Pathein in Ayeyarwady Division as the Southwest Region Commander. He served concurrently as the Chairman of the Ayeyarwady Peace and Development Council. In 2001, a panel of ten commanding officers promoted him by secret ballot to the post of Joint Chief of Staff of the Army, Navy, and Air Force and promoted him to Lieutenant General. In October 2003, he was promoted to Chief of General Staff of the Armed Services with the rank of General.

THE SENIOR GENERAL'S RIGHT-HAND MAN

¶4. (C) Shwe Mann is a trusted lieutenant of Senior General Than Shwe and has served as his hatchet man on several occasions. According to some sources, Than Shwe bypassed his deputy, Maung Aye, and then-Prime Minister Khin Nyunt when he ordered the attack on Aung San Suu Kyi's convoy at Depayin in May 2003. He ordered lower-ranking officers to carry it out, with Shwe Mann responsible for the military aspects. After Shwe Mann informed Maung Aye of the order, according to one contact (ref C), Maung Aye ordered him to proceed. In October 2004, Shwe Mann again played a lead role in the arrest of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and his military intelligence network on charges of corruption. Thus, some observers conclude that Shwe Mann is loyal to both Maung Aye and Than Shwe and enjoys their trust. Senior and junior officers of the three military branches also respect Shwe Mann. When Than Shwe took an emergency health trip to Singapore in late December 2006, Shwe Mann, not Maung Aye, reportedly managed the day-to-day affairs of state and received visiting Chinese dignitaries. The latter point is not surprising, given Maung Aye's well-known anti-Chinese sentiments.

FAMILY AND BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

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¶5. (C) Shwe Mann is married to Khin Lay Thet. Like most wives of the top generals, she is a member of the Panel of Patrons and one of four vice presidents of the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation. They have three sons who are included with their parents on the EU's visa ban and financial sanctions lists.

-- Son: Aung Thet Mann. He owns a company named Ayeya Shwe Wa Company.

-- Son: Toe Naing Mann. He married Zay Zin Latt (DOB: March 24, 1981), the daughter of Khin Shwe, a well-known entrepreneur and former "caterer" for Khin Nyunt. Khin Shwe's company, Zaykaba Co. Ltd. operates the Karawein Restaurant, a structure on Kandawgyi Lake in Rangoon shaped like a golden duck.

-- Son: Shwe Mann Ko Ko. He was married in late 2006. Than Shwe reportedly advised Shwe Mann to hold a quiet ceremony, following domestic and international criticism of the ostentatious wedding of Than Shwe's daughter a few months earlier.

¶6. (C) After the arrest of Khin Nyunt, Shwe Mann famously said, "Nobody is above the law." While he may not be as notoriously corrupt as some of his colleagues, Shwe Mann has solid connections to regime business cronies. He is reported to be a director in Tay Za's Htoo Construction Company, and is also allegedly involved in fertilizer, brokerage, and fish export businesses. In addition, his sons are reported to use their father's connections to advance their business interests.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

¶7. (C) Shwe Mann visited India in December 2006 to appeal for more armaments for his military forces (ref D). He appears to be a strong proponent of closer ties with India. He traveled to Pakistan in late 2006 to attend the Idea 2006 arms show in Karachi. He has also visited Thailand, Bangladesh, and China (ref B). Observers cite these recent

travels as evidence of Shwe Mann's preparations to assume higher responsibilities.

THE HEIR APPARENT?

¶8. (C) Most observers believe that Than Shwe wants Shwe Mann to succeed him as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Senior General. Than Shwe reportedly has serious health issues and wants to retire, but fears that if Maung Aye remains in power after he retires, Maung Aye might sack senior military officers loyal to Than Shwe, who would protect Than Shwe's interests and his family. Shwe Mann is nearly 15 years younger than Than Shwe and a decade younger than Maung Aye. Unlike SPDC numbers one and two, Shwe Mann has no known health issues. He prudently spends most of his time running the Ministry of Defense and keeps a low public profile.

¶9. (C) Some sources claim Shwe Mann is pro-reform and would move the country back into the mainstream once he consolidates power. Our sources have told us that they have written critical analyses proposing reforms that they believe have been passed to Shwe Mann. The Track II dialogue with the EU (ref A) has also reportedly been initiated on Shwe Mann's behalf. Thus far, Shwe Mann has given no hints of his policy direction and will probably wait until Than Shwe and Maung Aye leave the scene to reveal his hand. In the meantime, he will continue to wait patiently for his turn at the top.

VILLAROSA